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Policy Advocacy: Standards for Professional Learning

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper advocates for a district-level policy that employs the Standards for Professional Learning to define what high-quality professional learning should look like. The Standards for Professional Learning represent a compilation of decades of research on what characterizes effective professional learning. Since improvements in professional learning will lead to large-scale school improvement, this paper concludes that the Standards be used to define effective professional learning. Presented in this paper is an analysis of need from the educational, economic, political, social, and ethical perspectives. An argument in favor of adopting the standards is presented, and a counterargument is considered. The paper includes an implementation plan and a plan for assessing the effectiveness of the standards.

## PREFACE

In January of 2015, I began my doctoral studies in Educational Leadership at National-Louis University. At that time, I was an Instructional Specialist at Hamlin Middle School (pseudonym). My job responsibilities included supporting the professional development of teachers in English Language Arts and Social Studies. Prior to my doctoral studies, my district had transitioned to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics. The transition involved teachers writing new curricula, aligning resources, and attempting to shift instructional practices to match the new standards.

From my perspective as an Instructional Specialist, I observed many teachers meeting these tasks with frustration, confusion, anxiety, and resentment. In my opinion, teachers were being asked to do something they did not know how to do. There was a lack of adequate professional development to prepare them for the tasks they were being held accountable for completing.

On the other hand, I observed the teachers who took personal responsibility for their own learning and showed initiative in securing ways to develop professionally weathered the storm much better. I was amazed at how little effort some teachers put into their own learning, and strongly believed teachers, as promoters of learning, needed to do a better job of promoting their own learning. I clearly remember a colleague of mine, saying, “We have been asking for years for professional development on teaching reading in the content areas, but we have never gotten it.” My unspoken response was, “Do you mean for years you have not known how to do your job and did nothing about it?”

My whole life, I have been someone who has taken initiative for my own learning. In the summer prior to beginning the doctoral program, I enrolled in an online course through a Harvard extension called Leaders of Learning. This Massive Online Open Course, or MOOC, was taught by leading educational theorist, Richard Elmore. This class introduced me to the Modes of Learning Framework, which organized learning across two continua. According to Dr. Elmore, learning tends to be either hierarchically driven, when content is packaged in a pre-defined sequence and disseminated from an expert to a novice, or distributed, where the learner takes responsibility for organizing learning. Learning also occurs individually or collectively. When arranged in a matrix, these continua form four “modes” of learning: Hierarchical-Individual, Hierarchical-Collective, Distributed-Individual, and Distributed-Collective. In reality, the modes do not function in isolation of one another, however learners show preferences for different modes of learning for different purposes.

I began to think about how the Modes of Learning might be adapted to describe Modes of *Professional Learning*. I thought about who is responsible for designing professional learning experiences. How much responsibility rests with the school district, and how much should teachers be expected to pursue on their own? I thought about whether or not teachers learn better in groups, or working independently.

In the first year of my three-part dissertation, I used the Modes of Learning Framework to understand teachers’ perceptions on these questions. I concluded there is a need for mode of professional learning within a comprehensive professional development program. In the second year, I researched change efforts necessary to ensure that each mode of professional learning contributed to the school functioning as a learning system

which promotes continuous improvement. I came to understand that change is a complex process that requires thoughtful responses across a variety of contexts. In my final year, I advocated for a policy to implement Standards for Professional Learning. I believe that by having a shared understanding of what constitutes high-quality professional learning, schools and districts will make more progress towards improving learning for students.

I began this doctoral journey as a teacher. In my final semester the program, I became a middle school principal. Being in a position of legitimate authority means I have a lot of responsibility in helping teachers grow professionally, supporting both hierarchical and distributed modes of learning, as well as encouraging teachers to learn individually and collectively. I am extremely grateful that I had the opportunity to read, write, and think deeply on this responsibility during my three years of dissertation work.

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## SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

We are living in an age when information is more accessible than ever before. As a result, *knowing* has become easy to accomplish. One need only type several words into an iPhone to find information in seconds. Given this development, in place of knowing, the ability to *learn* has become critically important. To learn something, one must evaluate sources, consider perspectives, and integrate new understandings with past ones in order to create new knowledge. Being successful in the 21st century means being a skilled learner, not just a knower. Now more than ever, teachers must be able to create conditions for students that enable them to develop as learners. However, in the words of Yale professor and education reformer, Seymour Sarason (1993), “Teachers cannot create and sustain the conditions for the productive development of children if those conditions do not exist for teachers” (p. xiv). When viewed from this perspective, the conditions for teacher professional learning become as important as the conditions for student learning.

For the last the last two years, I have been researching teacher professional learning in a middle school setting. My research has been rooted in the dual perspectives of program evaluation and change leadership to improve professional learning. During this time, I developed an awareness of the need for improved policy to support teacher professional learning as a method of school improvement.

Joellen Killion (2011) wrote, “Professional learning is the only vehicle available to every school to improve teaching and student learning. It is a core practice in all school systems, yet its quality is uneven and its results are inconsistent” (p. 45). Killion’s statement explains why professional learning is a critical issue in need of a policy response. Although some form of professional development is most likely occurring at

every school, the extent to which it impacts teacher practice and student learning is variable.

In this policy advocacy paper, I recommend that the Standards for Professional Learning be adopted by school systems at the district level. In 2011, Learning Forward (previously known as the National Staff Development Council) revised an existing standards document with support from the MetLife Foundation. The standards revision task force sought input from representatives from major educational institutions, including the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Education Association, National Governors Association, and the U.S. Department of Education. According to Learning Forward, “The Standards for Professional Learning describe the attributes of effective professional learning to guide the decisions and practices of all persons with the responsibility to fund, regulate, manage, conceive, organize, implement, and evaluate professional learning” (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 14). These standards apply knowledge of best practices in making professional development effective.

I envision this policy will be effective in supporting teacher professional learning because the standards articulate solutions to many of the issues noted in my program evaluation and change leadership plan. First, the standards make explicit several prerequisites for effective professional learning that connect to my previous research. One prerequisite is, “Each educator involved in professional learning comes to the experience ready to learn” (Killion & Crow, p. 15). From my perspective, part of being ready to learn involves accepting responsibility to engage in individual, self-initiated learning experiences. In my program evaluation, I surveyed teachers and asked, “What

are individual teachers responsible for in professional learning?” The majority of respondents (76.3%) believed that the responsibility for professional learning rested primarily within the hierarchical structures of the institution (Crement, 2015). While the school or district does have considerable responsibility for providing opportunities for educators to engage in professional learning, the prerequisite that teachers come to the experience ready to learn distributes responsibility between the institution and each individual educator.

Another prerequisite of the standards is, “Like all learners, educators learn in different ways and at different rates” (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 15). This prerequisite supports my judgment that the school should function as a learning system that maximizes the impact of multiple modes of learning (Crement, 2016). Because teachers learn in different ways, they should be provided various ways of engaging in learning, both as individuals or in groups, and on topics that are district-directed or self-initiated.

Beyond the prerequisites, the standards themselves will be effective in supporting effective teacher professional learning. The standards address the following seven concepts (Killion & Crow, 2011):

1. Learning communities
2. Leadership
3. Resources
4. Data
5. Learning designs
6. Implementation
7. Outcomes

What follows is an explanation of each standard and how I envision it impacting the areas I researched in my program evaluation and change leadership plans.

## **Learning Communities**

*Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 28).*

In my program evaluation, I found that the majority of teachers surveyed (60.5%) responded that teachers learn best among colleagues with shared interests and values (Crement, 2015). In order to build collective responsibility and school commitment, teachers must be in a learning community that shares their values.

## **Learning Designs**

*Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 40).*

Professional learning can occur online through webinars, massive online open courses (MOOCs), or through a badging system called micro-credentials. It can occur face-to-face through courses, workshops, book studies, and demonstrations. It can be formal training, or informal, job-embedded coaching and reflection. In my change leadership plan, I acknowledged that professional learning cannot be a one-size-fits-all proposition. The standard for learning designs underscores the importance of utilizing multiple models of learning to support teachers' growth and development.

## **Outcomes**

*Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 48).*

Unless professional learning is tied to outcomes, it is a fruitless exercise. Richard Elmore (2002) has described the concept of *reciprocal accountability*. This means that for every unit of performance that a district leader expects from a teacher, they have a responsibility to provide a unit of learning. Likewise, for each unit of learning that is provided, teachers have a reciprocal accountability to demonstrate performance. In my program evaluation, I recommended that schools and districts make this relationship explicit. The outcome standard listed above supports my recommendation.

### **Leadership**

*Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning* (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 28).

In my change leadership plan, I discussed the changing nature of the role of the school principal. I cited Fullan (2014), who believed that the principal should function as a lead learner in a system. The research of Vivienne Robinson (2011) confirmed that the single most impactful behavior of a school leader is to participate as a learner alongside teachers. The leadership standard affirms the relationship between school leaders and the professional learning they lead.

### **Data**

*Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning* (Killion & Crow, 2011 p. 36).

Comments made in the focus groups of my program evaluation indicated that teachers are sometimes unclear how decisions about professional development are made

(Crement, 2015). By using data from classroom, local, and statewide assessments, as well as teacher evaluation data and culture and climate surveys, professional development could be more effectively planned and evaluated.

### **Implementation**

*Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change* (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 44).

My program evaluation revealed a need for providing continued follow-up to training. My change leadership plan described the culture, context, conditions, and competencies that are necessary to bring about a change in professional learning. This standard makes my previous recommendations explicit.

### **Resources**

*Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning*  
(Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 32).

Perhaps the greatest resource in professional learning is time. In my program evaluation, I recommended that the use of time be prioritized to allow for teachers to collaborate and to learn from one another.

In this section, I have presented a vision for the ways in which a policy requiring the use of standards for professional learning will positively impact teachers and students. In the next section, I will conduct an analysis of need from the educational, economic, social, political, and moral perspectives.

## SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

In the previous section, I explained my vision for how a policy in support of the Standards for Professional Learning would positively impact schools. In this section, I will conduct an educational, economic, political, social, and ethical analysis that supports the need for such a policy. The wording of the standards provides for the basis of my analyses. What follows is my interpretation of the ideas and research behind each of the five analyses as captured in the wording of the standards.

### Educational Analysis

Every recent educational reform initiative has carried with it the expectation for professional development (Guskey, 2000). The link between *high-quality* professional development and student achievement is well-documented, and the research into what makes professional development high quality undergirds the standards. The best professional development experiences help teachers feel better about teaching, allowing students to feel better about learning (Shaha, Lewis, O'Donnell, & Brown, 2004). Simply put, improving educational outcomes for students is unlikely without addressing the conditions in which teachers learn to improve (Sarason, 1993).

The educational need for using the Standards for Professional Learning is captured in the outcome standard, which says professional learning must align “its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards” (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 23). In other words, effective professional learning results in teachers teaching better and students learning better. Surprisingly, this seemingly self-evident connection is often missed when planning professional learning. Thomas Guskey (2000) used an example from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to describe this overlooked standard. An

exchange between Alice and the Cheshire Cat reveals that if it doesn't matter where you get to, then it doesn't matter how you get there. In many cases, "professional learning" experiences occur without a direct correlation between the experience and how it will measurably improve student learning. The outcome standard addresses the Cheshire Cat's observation by explicitly linking professional learning to educational outcomes.

The learning designs standard supports the outcomes standard by describing the type of learning that is necessary for achieving outcomes. The former standard states effective professional learning "integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes" (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 23). People who plan professional learning must incorporate the theories and principles that actually promote learning. For example, if increasing teacher knowledge in a content area is an articulated educator outcome, then the professional learning experience should take into account teacher prior knowledge and calibrate the experience to teacher needs to increase its effectiveness (Minor, Desimone, Lee, & Hochberg, 2016).

### **Economic Analysis**

This economic need for adopting the Standards for Professional Learning is supported by the resources standard, which states that effective professional learning "requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning" (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 23). The single biggest expense within school budgets is educator salaries. Therefore, any mechanism that exists to improve teacher quality should be subjected to economic scrutiny. According to Shaha et al. (2004), "In the age of accountability, organizations cannot justify spending on professional development programs that do not represent investments" (p. 9). However, it is often difficult to

determine whether or not professional learning represents an investment in accomplishing an objective. Doing so would require districts to account for exactly how much money is spent on professional development. According to Marguerite Roza (2010), districts do not track professional development spending per teacher or per pupil. She calls this “fuzzy math” (introduction, para. 5), which results in “driving blind” (Chapter 4, Section 1, para. 5).

In his research, Fermanich (2002) suggested that the difficulty in assessing a financial investment in professional development is due to the ineffective methods used to budget, track, and report expenditures. For example, the financial responsibility for professional learning is often diffused across various school and district departments and across funding sources. In email communication with district-level administrators in a school district outside Chicago, it was confirmed that the directors of curriculum and instruction, English learning, and special education each manage their own budgets, sometimes streaming from multiple grants, with various stipulations about professional development (F. Lopez, personal communication, April 21, 2017) . While the director of technology does not have a specific budget for professional learning, software companies often include it as part of a purchased package (W. Witkowsky, personal communication, April 19, 2017). The investment in teacher professional learning allocated to graduate school tuition reimbursement and the resulting salary increases for educators are not included as professional development expenses, whereas chart paper for institute day is (A. Zaher, personal communication, April 22, 2017).

Compounding this problem are varying definitions of what constitutes professional learning in the first place. Some educators define professional development

in the traditional sense, meaning workshops, conferences, and classes, for which the financial investment is relatively simple to measure. However, integrated forms of professional learning, such as mentoring, task force participation, and individual teacher learning activities, which are embedded into a teacher's daily work, are more complicated.

Although calculating true costs for professional learning is exceedingly complex, Odden (2012) estimated that the cost is about \$14,750 per teacher per year, or 21% of a teacher's salary and benefits. With such a substantial investment in using professional learning to deliver educational outcomes, a strong economic need for using the resource standard exists.

### **Political Analysis**

In the previous section, I outlined the economic need to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning. In this section, I will describe the political need, which stems directly from the economic need. As previously stated, it is very difficult to measure economic investment in professional learning. Unfortunately, this difficulty results in greater political scrutiny, as stakeholders and policymakers in the educational system expect to see concrete numbers representing a return on investment (Crow, 2017). Unfortunately, student performance in many settings does not improve, making large expenses politically difficult to justify (Miles, Odden, Fermanich, & Archbald, 2004).

At the time of this writing, the Trump administration has proposed a complete elimination of Title II, Part A, which is the federal funding source responsible for improving teacher and principal quality. The majority of these funds are spent on professional development (Coggschall, 2015). According to *U.S. News and World Report*,

the Trump administration has justified this cut by describing Title II, Part A as being “poorly targeted and spread thinly across thousands of districts with scant evidence of impact” (as quoted in Camera, 2017). At this time, the debate over Title II, Part A has fully entered the realm of the political spectacle. According to Smith (2004), the political spectacle positions actors as heroes and villains, enemies and allies, plotting their actions in an epic struggle of good versus evil. The two largest teacher unions in the country describe Trump’s budget cuts as “a nightmare for children,” (Weingarten, 2017), which will “crush the dreams of students and deprive millions of opportunities” (Eskelsen Garcia, 2017).

Unfortunately, there is data to back up the Trump administration’s proposal. In a survey of 7,000 teachers, professional development was described as “superficial, short-lived, and incoherent” (Coggshall, 2015, p. 5). One of the lead writers of the Standards for Professional Learning, Tracey Crow, agreed. She stated, “There are many examples of professional development that has wasted educators’ time and precious dollars” (2017, p. 10). While Trump’s proposed budget cut may come as a shock to some, Thomas Guskey (2000) warned of this possibility 17 years ago when he wrote, “It is of little wonder that when faced with budgetary constraints, one of the first items considered for reduction typically is funding for professional development” (p. 4).

To understand how the political debate has reached such hyperbolic levels, it is useful to consider how Title II, Part A was born. No Child Left Behind, as well as the reauthorized Every Student Succeeds Act, were bipartisan efforts to support and improve the nation’s schools (Hirsh, 2017). Leaving no child behind is a noble aspiration indeed, but it was largely symbolic in terms of policy. Diane Ravitch (2010) recalled that “No

doubt everyone in the room agreed with that sentiment [of NCLB], though no one was quite certain how it would happen” (p. 100). According to Jane Coggshall (2015) of the American Institutes for Research, “Title II, Part A was the spoonful of sugar to help educators swallow the test-based accountability system and highly qualified teacher provisions of No Child Left Behind” (p. 2). Sadly, like all sugars, Title II, Part A seemed to provide little sustenance to improving schools. Coggshall continued, “This unfocused policy, with no mechanism in place to learn from local implementation efforts, has led to a diffusion of effort and money spent on programs that do little to improve teaching and leading in ways that matter for student learning” (p. 3).

Title II, Part A is now up for total elimination due to poor implementation practices. Therefore, the political need for adopting the Standards for Professional Learning resides in the implementation standard. It states that effective professional learning “applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change” (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 23). Previous efforts at teacher professional learning have not always met this standard. There may have been little regard for how the professional learning would be sustained and supported, nor on how professional learning would impact change. If Title II, Part A withstands the proposed budget cut, rectifying the implementation gap will remain important. If it does not, the funds supporting professional learning will be greatly reduced. Getting implementation right will be absolutely critical.

### **Social Analysis**

The social need for adopting the Standards for Professional Learning resides in the standard for learning communities. This standard states that high-quality professional

learning “occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment” (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 23). The learning communities standard recognizes that learning is an inherently social process, and that everyone within the school system is accountable to the success of the whole system. In this way, the strength of the school community is determined by the quality of relationships that exist within the community, and the cohesion that exists among learners (Block, 2009).

The sense of cohesion defined in the learning community standard is often referred to as *social capital*. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) wrote, “Social capital refers to how the quantity and quality of relationships, interactions, and social relationships among people affect their access to knowledge and information; their sense of expectation, obligation, and trust; and how far they are likely to adhere to the same norms of codes of behavior” (p. 90). They continued, “Learning is the work and social capital is the fuel. If social capital is weak, everything else is destined for failure” (p. 92).

Strong social capital must exist between teachers within a school, but it also extends to families and community partners, as well. According to Blanks, all stakeholders must have opportunities to come together to create and share a common vision for children (as cited in Purinton and Azcoitia, 2016). In this way, a school with high social capital has the potential to strengthen the entire network by establishing bonds of trust among teachers, as well as between teachers and principals, schools and parents, and schools and communities (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

## Ethical Analysis

The ethical need for adopting the Standards for Professional Learning is in the stem that opens each of the seven standards. Each standard begins with the following phrase, “Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for *all students* ... [emphasis added]” According to Stephanie Hirsh, president of Learning Forward, that phrase is a key element within the stem. It signals that high-quality professional learning is a matter of equity because, it increases the likelihood that all students will be successful (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 22).

Karen Carlson (2016) stated, “Education is essentially a moral undertaking because it concerns the development of human beings” (p. 91). Unfortunately, education in certain contexts has also had a dehumanizing effect. Educational theorist Paolo Freire (1996) called this the “banking concept” of education. This view of education does not accept learners as fully human, but instead as empty containers to be filled by the teacher. He wrote, “The more completely [the teacher] fills the receptacles, the better teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (p. 53).

The degree to which the banking concept of education is carried out in schools varies across racial and socioeconomic lines. In her study entitled “Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work,” Jean Anyon (1980) studied five elementary schools representative of different social classes throughout the course of one year. She concluded that variance in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices highlighted different expectations for cognitive and behavioral skills. Each social class was educated in ways that would prepare them to assume jobs within that social class, thus perpetuating

a cycle of economic stratification. Burch (2003) summarized this asymmetry by saying, “citizens residing in affluent districts (overwhelmingly White) are educated to govern, whereas citizens residing in economically disadvantaged districts (overwhelmingly people of color) are educated to be governed” (p. 265).

Instead of the banking concept of education, Freire (1996) promoted inquiry for all students. He says, “Apart from inquiry ... individuals cannot be truly human” (p. 53). However, in order for teachers to lead and promote inquiry for students, they must engage in inquiry themselves (Sarason, 1993). Professional learning experiences should take the shape of action research, in which teachers collect data, study their own practices, and develop methods of improving (Milner & Howard, 2015). This type of professional learning is supported by standard of learning designs, which requires that professional development apply theories of human learning, such as action research and inquiry, to achieve outcomes.

While it is absolutely the responsibility of teachers to confront systems of inequity, Richard Milner (2015) suggested that the locus of control may rest more with educational leaders. Milner often goes to school districts to present on the topics of race and social class as they relate to student achievement. He noted that while principals and superintendents typically expect excellence from their teachers, they rarely engage in the type of professional learning that would enable them to “promote, ensure, and sustain teacher effectiveness” (p. 31).

The Standards for Professional Learning address this issue in the standard of leadership, which states that effective professional learning “requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning” (Killion

& Crow, 2011, p. 23). According to Carlson, it is critically important that principals, superintendents, and other decision makers are able to promote professional learning experiences that support the whole child, engage in difficult conversations about race, poverty, and gender equity, and eliminate excuses for achievement gaps (as cited in Purinton and Azcoitia, 2016).

In this section, I conducted several analyses from distinct disciplinary areas to better understand the need for policy on adopting the Standards for Professional Learning. I began with analyzing the educational need and concluded that high-quality professional development is a key ingredient in improving outcomes for students. I then examined the economic need, showing that adopting the standards will allow for better return on investment by guiding how professional development resources are allocated. I followed the economic analysis with a political need, which is quite simply the reality that publicly funded professional learning experiences that do not meet high standards are highly susceptible to political scrutiny. Next, I addressed the social need for adopting the standards: professional development that occurs in the context of learning communities builds social capital within the system, which impacts student achievement. I concluded with the ethical analysis, which concludes that teachers need access to professional learning experiences that better enable them to address opportunity and achievement gaps so that all students can achieve to high levels. In the next section, I will provide an advocated policy statement.

### **SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT**

In this section, I present my policy statement in support of a district-level policy to use the Standards for Professional Learning as a way of defining what high-quality professional learning should look like. I will begin by articulating the purpose of the policy. I will then provide definitions of terms that are frequently used within the policy. Finally, I will outline the policy's key elements.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to implement the Standards for Professional Learning in support of high-quality professional development. This policy reflects the need for all students to have teachers with the capacity to nurture their personal growth and increase academic achievement. In order to advance student academic achievement, teacher achievement must be supported, as well. By implementing this policy, all educators within the system will have the opportunity to engage in learning experiences that promote mastery in their core roles responsibilities. The policy will also allow the district to be a responsible steward of taxpayer resources by ensuring that time and money spent on professional development allow the district to achieve its vision for success.

The Standards for Professional Learning have been validated to be appropriate and good through the collaborative effort of individuals who have with recognized expertise within the educational community, representing such organizations as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, The Council of Chief State School Officers, the

National Education Association, and the U.S. Department of Education, among others (Killion & Crow, 2011, pp. 8–9).

### **Definitions**

Before fully describing the policy and its goals and objectives, it is important to clearly define the key elements of the policy. The following definitions provide a context for what the policy addresses.

- *Professional development/professional learning* refers to any program or practice intended to “improve educator practice and students results” (Killion & Crow, 2011 p. 6.) Professional development/learning can occur external to the school organization, or be embedded within the daily work of educators. Examples of the concept can be:
  - Formal experiences pursued by individual educators (e.g., university coursework), or attendance at conferences and workshops
  - Informal experiences pursued by individual educators (e.g., reading professional books and journals), and consuming online resources such as webinars
  - Formal experiences pursued by collective groups of educators (e.g., scheduled content-area lesson planning and collaborative analysis of student work)
  - Informal experiences pursued by collective groups (e.g., book studies, action research, and peer coaching)
- *Learning communities* are groups of people who “continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire” (Senge, 2006, p. 3). Learning

communities can be formal and fixed, such as grade-level, content-area teams, or informal and fluid, such as an ad hoc committee of parents, students, and teachers.

- *Leadership* refers to any educator who sets an agenda for professional learning at the classroom, school, or school system level (Killion & Crow, 2011).
- *Resources* refers to the “human, fiscal, material, technology, and time” (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 32) elements devoted to professional learning experiences.
- *Data* refers to any set of evidence that can be used to guide decision-making about the content or processes of professional learning. Examples of data include, but are not limited to, student performance data (e.g., informal, formal, and standardized assessment); educator performance data (e.g., informal and formal evaluations); systematic observational records; demographic data; student attendance and behavioral data; and student and teacher perception data.
- *Learning designs* refers to the experience in which educators engage in professional growth and development. Learning designs take into account the environment, delivery, and action of the learning experience (Easton, 2015).
- *Implementation* takes into account research on change and the elements needed to support and sustain long-term change.
- *Outcomes* refers to the “permanent change in knowledge or behavior” (Katz & Dack, 2013) that results from a learning experience. Outcomes are measured through the data sources listed above.

### **Key Elements**

This policy recognizes that professional learning is a key lever for school improvement. As such, this policy acknowledges the principle of reciprocal

accountability, which states that for every unit of performance a school system demands of educators, it has a responsibility to provide a unit of capacity. Likewise, for every unit of capacity that a school system provides, educators have a reciprocal responsibility to demonstrate performance (Elmore, 2002).

This policy requires school and district leadership to embed the Standards for Professional Learning into existing performance evaluation standards. For certified teachers, the standards will be embedded into Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For school administrators, the Standards for Professional Learning will be embedded into Standard II: Leading and Managing Systems Change, and Standard III: Improving Teaching and Learning of the Illinois Performance Standards for School Leaders.

## **SECTION FOUR: ARGUMENT**

### **Introduction**

In this project, I am advocating for a districtwide policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning. As a researcher and practitioner, it is my belief that this policy is the right one. However, when implementing policy, it is imperative that advocates examine arguments both for and against it.

In an episode of the *Freakonomics* podcast, Cornell Psychology professor Tom Gilovich described the danger of only considering one side of an argument. He stated, “If you believe that a certain policy is the right one, you tend to over-recruit evidence in favor of that belief.” He went on to say that when the policy fails, people conduct a “post-mortem” to figure out what went wrong. Instead, Gilovich recommended conducting what he calls a pre-mortem: “Imagine it worked out badly, and then explain it to yourself” (Werth, 30:10–30:38).

In this section, I will present two separate arguments in favor of a policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning. After each argument, I will take Gilovich’s advice and conduct a pre-mortem by imagining that the policy failed and analyzing the argument I presented.

### **Complexity of Education Today**

The first argument in favor of adopting a policy to increase focus on teacher professional learning acknowledges the sheer complexity of work that educators face today. American education has undergone several major shifts since the turn of the 21st century, representing challenges for in-service educators. The first shift has been over the question, “For whom does education exist?” Schlechty (2001) wrote that the United

States has shifted “from a society in which only the culturally elite and the intellectually gifted were expected to achieve high levels of academic competence to a society in which nearly all students are expected to perform at levels once assumed to be the purview of the few” (p. 10). Today’s educators are held accountable for making sure that all students meet high expectations, although the path to doing so is not always understood.

Educators need to find new ways of confronting this challenge.

The second shift addresses the question, “What do we want students to know and be able to do?” It is impossible to overestimate the impact that technology has played on the answer to that question. Will Richardson (2016) wrote, “Here we now are, in an amazing moment when the vast majority of our students are able to connect to nearly the sum of human knowledge, almost half of the earth’s population, and a powerful slate of tools” (p. 27). Richardson continued, “Shouldn’t the focus of our work now be to develop kids as learners instead of knowers?” (p. 28). Again, this shift presents a challenge for educators. Previously, educators were tasked with imparting knowledge onto students, a function of teaching that is now far less important given the increased access to information.

These shifts have presented what Heifetz (2009) and his colleagues referred to as *adaptive challenges*. Compared with technical challenges, which have well-understood problems and known solutions, people face adaptive challenges when the problem itself is unclear and there is no known solution. According to Heifetz, “Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties” (p. 19). Simply put, adaptive challenges can be addressed only through learning. When viewed through this lens, a policy to address the ways in which educators

learn as professionals is highly appropriate. The changing needs of education necessitate the need for educators to continually learn.

According to Learning Forward, this argument in favor of increased focus on professional learning relies on the prerequisite that educators come to the experience ready to learn. “[Professional learning] cannot be effective if educators resist learning” (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 15). Therefore, the pre-mortem analysis is the reality that some educators *are* resistant to learning. Richard Elmore (2002) attributed some of the resistance to educators having experienced ineffective professional development in the past. Elmore warned, “If this [ineffective] professional development cycle is run repeatedly, it produces a negative reinforcement pattern. Teachers become cynical about any new idea when no previous new ideas have worked” (p. 25).

The cynicism that Elmore described was a noted theme in my program evaluation on teacher professional learning. When asked, “What are individual teachers responsible for in professional learning?” 76.3% of respondents selected answers that represented a hierarchical view of professional learning, one in which teachers are responsible for receiving what the district gives them. However, within this hierarchical view, some teachers expressed a lack of trust that decisions about professional learning made at a district level were well-grounded. On the Modes of Professional Learning Survey, one participant added the following comment: “Most PD is not geared toward anything I will need to know to be a better teacher; it’s purely for the sake of the district.” A focus group participant echoed this sentiment: “I have never gotten a giant sense that the district truly cares about what we’re interested in learning.” These experiences may leave teachers

feeling cynical and resistant to an increased focus on professional learning (Crement, 2015).

While this theme of distrust within a hierarchical system was noted within my own school, it is useful to consider the theme through a historical lens. It is only recently that teachers have been empowered as decision makers who have a need to increase learning to improve decision making. Throughout the 20th century, teaching was viewed as women's work. According to Barnett Berry (2013), teachers have been expected to be "subservient to political, bureaucratic, and school managerial authorities on matters of policy and practice" (p. 6). Diane Ravitch (2010) also recognized this dynamic when she characterized the relationship between mostly female teachers and mostly male administrators and school boards as being "paternalistic" (p. 183). Richard Ingersoll (2003) maintained that teachers have had limited control over professional development, and that "factory-like schools ... deny teachers the autonomy and authority and flexibility necessary for caring, engaged, efficacious, committed teaching" (p. 43). Although the standards would promote teachers-as-learners, many educators may have entered the profession unprepared to assume this role based on the historical context of teaching.

The bottom line of this pre-mortem argument is that while increasing the focus on professional learning depends on teachers who are empowered to actively engage in their own learning and growth, the system of education historically has discouraged such engagement. A policy in favor of implementing the standards runs the risk of being consumed by the very problem it seeks to address. Administrators at the district level may also argue that they are already providing professional development experiences for

teachers and that teachers do not take full advantage of the opportunities. Adopting the standards may not be enough to overcome a culture of compliance.

### **Standards as a Target of Excellence**

I have argued that the changing nature of education and learning requires an increased focus on teacher professional learning. If that argument is accepted, then it stands to reason that adopting a set of standards to serve as a target of excellence for professional learning would be critical. In recent years, teachers in Illinois have been held accountable to meeting new sets of standards documents for each content area, including the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics, the Next Generation Science Standards, and the new Illinois Standards for Social Science, which were informed by the C3 Framework. Moreover, Danielson's Framework for Teaching outlines standards for educator practice in terms of planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Each of these documents promotes a constructivist view of education, in which the *learner* is responsible for the learning.

Considering the recent flurry of standards for student learning, relatively little attention has been paid to standards for professional learning. Roland Barth (1990) used the metaphor of the oxygen mask on airplanes to explain this gap. In the event of a change in cabin pressure, passengers are advised to put their own oxygen masks on first before assisting those around them. Barth stated, "In schools, we spend a great deal of time placing oxygen masks on each other's faces, while we ourselves are suffocating" (p. 42). Adopting the Standards for Professional Learning would be the much-needed oxygen mask to ensure that teachers are equipped to address student learning needs.

This argument assumes that educators have a mostly favorable view of standards documents. However, the pre-mortem analysis of this assumption recognizes that the word *standards* is not always met with positivity. In fact, educators may be somewhat leery of yet another reform document. In the book *The Teaching Gap: Best Ideas from the World's Educators for Improving Education in the Classroom*, authors Stigler and Hiebert (1999) wrote, "The American approach has been to write and distribute reform documents and ask teachers to implement the recommendations contained in such documents. Those who have worked on this problem understand that this approach does not work" (p. 12). A risk of adopting the standards may be that educators view the standards as just one more initiative they have to implement.

One of the reasons standards documents have not always been successful may be a lack of understanding behind the standards' intention. In examining national standards for student learning, the conservative think tank Heritage Foundation pointed out that instead of promoting a "target of excellence," standards too often promote "standardization [and] a uniform tendency toward mediocrity" (Marshall & Burke, 2010, p. 2). In other words, if the Standards for Professional Learning are perceived in any way as being a mechanism to *standardize* professional learning, the pre-mortem analysis may declare them dead on arrival.

### **Conclusion**

In this section, I presented arguments for and against a policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning. My first argument in favor of the policy was that the challenges of education in the 21st century require educators to adopt a learning stance and to use adaptive approaches to solving those challenges. My second argument was that

it is highly appropriate to set standards as a target of excellence to define what effective educator learning looks like.

After each argument, I conducted a pre-mortem analysis. I imagined that my advocated policy failed and I attempted to explain why. Each pre-mortem analysis revealed a reality in the existing context of education; the first being an overly hierarchical focus in education that leaves educators disempowered, the second being a reluctance within some circles to embrace standards in education. Ironically, the Standards for Professional Development can serve to address the very contexts that may doom them to failure. Therefore, thoughtful implementation of the policy will determine whether or not the standards will be successful. In the next section, I will present an implementation plan for putting the policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning into practice.

## **SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

### **Introduction**

In this section, I will present a process for implementing the Standards for Professional Learning at a district level. The goal of implementing the standards is to improve the learning of adults within a system to achieve greater results for all students. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) would categorize this goal as an adaptive challenge, because it “can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits and loyalties” (p. 19). Adaptive challenges require a mindset of continuous learning and the ability to make mid-course corrections. Adaptive challenges are contrasted with technical challenges, in which the problem is understood and the solution is known.

According to Heifetz and his colleagues, “The most common failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive changes as if they were technical problems” (p. 19). Technical problems have linear solutions; if something within an organization is broken, a part can be replaced and it can be fixed. Margaret Wheatley (2006) described this as the “standard approach to organizational change” (p. 138). Wheatley characterized this linear approach as being Newtonian, in that it assumes that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Wheatley concurred with Heifetz and his colleagues that this manner of thinking explains why most organizational changes fail.

Douglas Reeves (2009) lent a third voice of support for a non-Newtonian strategy. He stated, “Perhaps the most pervasive myth in change leadership is that planning—particularly large scale, and supposedly ‘strategic’ planning—leads to change” (p.42). Reeves cited a study that compared strategic plans of various school districts. The schools with the lowest scores on plan format had higher student proficiency levels than schools

with the highest scores on plan format. Based on this, he concluded, “[T]he emphasis that the schools placed on plan formatting was worse than a waste of time; it was inversely related to student achievement” (p. 43).

What follows in this section is not a perfectly formatted strategic plan with precise timetables and to-the-penny budget amounts. Doing so would treat the adaptive challenge of *learning how to learn better* as a technical problem. It would assume a Newtonian approach to organizational change: that professional learning in the system is broken and it could be fixed by introducing the Standards for Professional Learning as a replacement part. Instead, I have presented a process approach to implementation that follows the work of John Kotter (2012) in his book, *Leading Change*. Kotter is a professor from the Harvard Business School, therefore his writing is largely for a corporate audience. As such, I have aligned his eight-stage process with thought leaders from the field of education where appropriate. Within each stage, I have left room for learning, because learning is the work.

Because the goal of the policy is learning how to learn better, we can actually *use* the standards to *implement* the standards. This statement is somewhat confusing, like holding a mirror up to a mirror—with one image reflecting the other in an ever-repeating pattern, it is easy to become disoriented and lose sight of which image came first. In the same way, implementation of the Standards for Professional Learning is both the means to an end, and the end itself.

### **Step 1: Establish a Sense of Urgency**

According to Kotter (2012), the first step of change implementation is to establish a sense of urgency. In districts seeking to have the Standards for Professional Learning

adopted by the school board, it will be necessary to do so in those those who would be tasked with implementation before presenting the policy to the board for their consideration. Establishing a sense of urgency requires organizations to challenge complacency within the system, which can be established for a variety of reasons. One reason is a culture of “low candor and low confrontation” (Kotter, 2012, p. 42). In educational settings, Richard Elmore (2002) referred to this as “The Land of Nice,” wherein educators are reluctant to offer criticism or suggest actions for improvement.

Another source of complacency is quality measurements that focus on the wrong indexes (Kotter, 2012, p. 42). In regard to professional development, decisions about quality are often limited to a low level of evaluation. Thomas Guskey (2000) stated that this level is sometimes referred to as “the happiness quotient” (p. 82). Evaluation questions at this level focus on whether or not participants *liked* the experience, and if they felt their basic needs were attended. Participants’ reactions at this level may include whether or not the coffee was hot, the chairs were comfortable, and the room was the right temperature. While these questions should not be dismissed, they are insufficient to determine the true worth of professional development experiences, because they fail to address what participants learn and the impact that learning has on student outcomes. Moreover, paying too much attention to whether participants liked the experience can provide a false positive on quality and lead to complacency.

A third source of complacency is “too much happy talk from senior management” (Kotter, 2012, p. 42). From my personal experience, this happens a lot in education. In well-intentioned efforts to keep teachers motivated, principals and district administrators overemphasize how well the system is performing, thereby contributing to complacency

and eliminating motivation to improve. In her book *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*, Liz Wiseman (2017) pointed out that effective leaders “make people feel smart and capable; but [they] are not ‘feel-good’ managers. ... They utilize people to their fullest. They see a lot, so they expect a lot” (p. 24).

To begin an implementation of the Standards for Professional Learning, leaders will need to take inventory of these, and other sources of complacency, and work to eliminate them by creating a sense of urgency. There are various sources of data available to schools that might help raise the urgency level. One source is student performance data. In the corporate world, Kotter (2012) noted that performance data that demonstrates weakness in comparison to the competition is particularly effective. In education, however, it is less useful to view neighboring school districts as “competitors”—effective school districts create networks of collaboration with other school districts and do not “compete” against them (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). However, using comparison data to highlight gaps may nonetheless be valuable to the extent that it could reveal avenues for collaborative learning between districts. Such data would create a sense of urgency in accelerating the learning of adults in the system.

A second potentially useful source of data for providing a sense of urgency to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning is culture and climate surveys. One such example is the Illinois 5Essentials Survey. On the measure of collaborative teachers, there is an indicator of quality professional development. Teachers are asked to respond with how often their professional development within the last year has:

- Included opportunities to work productively with teachers from other schools

- Included enough time to think carefully about, try, and evaluate new ideas
- Been sustained and coherently focused, rather than short-term and unrelated
- Included opportunities to work productively with colleagues within my school
- Been closely connected to my school's improvement plan

Information collected through the 5Essentials can be used to highlight areas for improvement, and will establish a sense of urgency.

The above mentioned sources of data are already being collected in schools as part of regular programming and may be sufficient to create a sense of urgency toward implementing the Standards for Professional Learning. For school districts looking to take a deeper dive into evaluating the standards themselves, Learning Forward offers a paid instrument called the *Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI)*. The SAI allows educators to respond in Likert style about the frequency of actions that specifically relate to each of the seven standards.

In Section Two of this policy advocacy paper, I presented an analysis of need from the educational, economic, social, political, and moral perspectives. School districts might also explore each of these areas to help create a sense of urgency. Whichever source of data is used to create a sense of urgency to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning, the use of data in and of itself already meets one of the standards. The standard of data states that, "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data

to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning” (p. 23). Like holding a mirror up to a mirror, the standards can be used to as a means to an end, and are the end in and of themselves.

### **Step 2: Create a Guiding Coalition**

Once a sense of urgency has been established around the idea that current professional learning is ineffective, and therefore, that increasing the effectiveness of professional learning is an essential next step, it will be necessary to create a guiding coalition (Kotter, 2012). This group is made up of the people who will lead the work toward adopting the Standards for Professional Learning. Kotter acknowledged the importance of selecting the right membership within the coalition. From a corporate perspective, Kotter recommended several characteristics that he viewed as essential to the guiding coalition. From an educational perspective, I will reference Tony Bush (2003), author of *Theories of Educational Leadership*. Bush stated that there are six significant forms of power in schools. The first three are as follows:

1. Positional power (p. 98)—People with positional power have the legitimate authority to make changes within a school. They include school- and district-level administrators.
2. Authority of expertise (p. 98)—Educators who have accumulated expertise within their field based on accumulated knowledge and a history of documented results are seen to have authority. These people might be veteran teachers, instructional specialists, or department chairs.
3. Personal power (p. 99)—People with personal power are charismatic and able to influence others.

In creating a guiding coalition, membership should be selected among people who represent a cross-section of types of power. According to Heifetz and his colleagues, leaders should also pay attention to the factions that begin to emerge within the coalition. As Heifetz advised leaders,

Faction mapping of your close in-group will give you valuable information about the ways the larger system of people will deal with the issue, which is critically important because refining and implementing your change initiative will usually require the involvement of people from different factions and departments within the system. (p. 130)

In developing a guiding coalition to move toward implementation of the Standards for Professional Learning, the leadership standard is being addressed. It states, “Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning” (p. 23).

### **Step 3: Develop a Vision and a Strategy**

The third step in Kotter’s (2012) framework for leading change is developing a vision and a strategy. In Section One of this policy advocacy paper, I presented my personal vision for adopting the Standards for Professional Learning. I recognized that the instructional shifts for each of the main academic content areas as described in the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Math (2010), the Next Generation Science Standards (2013) and the C3 Framework for Social Studies (2013) all promote an inquiry approach to education where the focus is less on the knowing and more on the learning. Unfortunately, in my experience the shifts that are required *of*

*teachers* have not occurred *for teachers* in their own professional learning and growth. I quoted Seymour Sarason (1993) as saying, “Teachers cannot create and sustain the conditions for the productive development of children if those conditions do not exist for teachers” (p. xiv). In summary, my vision statement described a future reality in which the conditions for professional learning better equip educators to promote student learning.

While I have done this work as an individual from the perspective of a doctoral candidate, actual implementation of the Standards for Professional Learning will require a group within the district to develop a shared vision of professional learning. Heifetz (2009) and his colleagues recommended that framing this work should reach people “above and below the neck” (p. 128), by which they meant including both data and emotion. It is also important to ensure that the vision for professional learning relates to the vision of the district as a whole. In most organizations, this will be an easy connection to make, as most mission and vision statements include statements about realizing the full potential of students. A vision for professional learning would include an imperative to realize the potential of *all* learners—children and adults—in the system.

A shared vision for professional learning will only be successful to the extent that is congruent with behaviors within an organization. Margaret Wheatley (2006) stated that “visionary messages [are] matched by visionary behaviors. We also would know that vision must permeate through the entire organization as a vital influence on the behavior of all employees” (p. 56). Like holding a mirror up to a mirror, the Standards for Professional Learning outline the behaviors that support the vision.

#### **Step 4: Communicating the Change Vision**

A shared vision has limited value if only a select few share it. Therefore, Kotter (2012) stressed the importance of communicating the change vision as the fourth step. Kotter recommended using simplicity, multiple forums, repetition, and leadership by example to communicate the vision.

During this phase of implementation, it may be useful to introduce Innovation Configuration (IC) maps. These maps are available for purchase through the Learning Forward website for \$60.00 per book (or \$48.00 for Learning Forward members). According to Stephanie Hirsh (2012), IC maps “provide detailed steps in progressing along the pathway from one’s current set of behaviors to those described as ideal ... They stimulate conversations and action planning for those who support educators implementing standards” (pp. 4–5). For each of the seven Standards for Professional Learning, the IC maps identify several desired outcomes and describe each outcome on a continuum of behaviors. Each standard has been organized into 12 roles, each of which share responsibility for implementing professional learning. School-based roles include teachers, coaches, principals, and school leadership teams. District-based roles include central office administrators, directors of professional learning, superintendents, and school board members. There are also IC maps for external assistance providers. The IC maps can be used as a progress monitoring tool as needed.

During the phase of communicating the change vision, Heifetz et al. (2009) reminded leaders that listening is as important a part of communication as speaking. Leaders should spend time listening, gathering information, and planning for next steps. Heifetz advised leaders that once the vision has been communicated,

You cannot control what people do with the intervention. So as this process unfolds, resist the impulse to keep jumping in with follow-ups like, “No, what I really mean is...” or “Didn’t you hear me?” or “Let me say that again,” or “You misinterpreted what I said.” Let the people in the system work with your idea without getting too attached to it. (p. 129)

To reiterate, adopting the Standards for Professional Learning is an adaptive change. Once the shared vision is created and communicated, school and building leaders should accept that it will need to unfold somewhat organically based on the learning that occurs within the system.

### **Step 5: Empowering Broad-Based Action**

The fifth step in Kotter’s (2012) framework for leading change is to empower broad-based action. He stated, “Environmental change demands organizational change. Major transformation rarely happens unless many people assist” (p. 106). In order to create organizational change, leaders must remove structural barriers to enacting the vision. In his book, Kotter cited examples that are applicable to the corporate world.

For educational change, I will reference the work of Douglas Reeves (2009). In terms of removing structural barriers to empower broad-based action, Reeves wrote, “Pull the weeds. Then, and only then, plant the flowers” (p. 13). In other words, leaders must eliminate what does *not* work before replacing it with something that will. According to Reeves, failure to do so would result in statements such as, “We’ll have professional learning communities—just as soon as we finish making announcements at faculty meetings” (p. 14).

If the shared vision is effectively communicated, for example, using IC maps, and the members of the guiding coalition appreciate the importance of listening as described in the previous section, the structural barriers to full implementation of the Standards for Professional Learning will begin to emerge. Once again, the standards themselves will also direct educators on how to go about removing those barriers. For example, teachers might identify lack of time as a structural barrier to implementing the standards. This realization might prompt the principal to reflect on the resources standard, which states, “Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning” (p. 23). The principal might then consult the IC maps. Desired Outcome 3.1.3 details how the principal should work with the school leadership team and staff to create “a daily schedule for learning teams to meet during the school day at least three times per week” (p. 214). The principal should then take action to address the structural barrier.

### **Step 6: Generating Short-Term Wins**

Kotter’s (2012) sixth step in leading change is generating short-term wins. He stated that a short-term win has the following three characteristics:

1. It’s visible; large numbers of people can see for themselves, whether the result is real or just hype.
2. It’s unambiguous; there can be little argument over the call.
3. It’s clearly related to the change effort (p. 126).

Kotter recommended that a short-term win in a corporate setting should occur within the first 6 to 18 months of an innovation. Because a “year” of school is actually

about nine and a half calendar months, I would suggest a short-term win in an educational setting occur sooner than Kotter's recommendation.

The members of the guiding coalition should be strategic about generating the short-term win. Consider the following example: Student behavior data on out-of-school suspensions indicates a teacher learning need on restorative justice practices. Professional learning experiences are planned, with careful attention to having adequate resources in terms of internal and external expertise that align to the learning. Educators have the opportunity to implement their learning in classroom practice and process their experiences in professional learning communities. After three months of focused and sustained professional learning on restorative justice practices, out-of-school suspensions have decreased. A short-term win has been generated, and momentum will increase because the professional learning was aligned to student outcomes. This would be cause for celebration. As Kotter (2012) stated, "The little celebration following a win can be good for the body and spirit" (p. 127).

### **Step 7: Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change**

After an accumulation of several short-term wins, the next phase of Kotter's (2012) process in leading change is consolidating gains and producing more change. Collins (2005) described this phase in the process in terms of the "flywheel" concept. He wrote, "When people begin to see tangible results—when they can feel the flywheel beginning to build speed—that's when most people line up to throw their shoulders against the wheel and push" (p. 24). When educators begin to experience "professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students" (p. 23), they

will be motivated to experience more high-quality professional learning, which will further improve performance and increase results.

While the corporate world can point to profits to push the flywheel, Collins suggested that the link to success in social sectors is brand reputation. A school that has a reputation for excellence will draw higher-quality human capital, and levels of school commitment and collective responsibility will increase accordingly. It is critical at this stage to push for full implementation of the Standards for Professional Learning. Kotter explained this cardinal rule: “*Whenever you let up before the job is done, critical momentum can be lost and regression may follow*” (p. 139, emphasis original).

### **Step 8: Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture**

The final step in Kotter’s (2012) Eight-Stage Process for leading change is anchoring new approaches in the culture of the organization. According to Kotter, “Culture changes only after you have successfully altered people’s actions, after the new behavior produces some group benefit for a period of time, and after people see the connection between the new actions and the performance improvement” (p. 164–165). In other words, a school will not become a culture where professional learning is valued until teachers and school leaders engage in behaviors that reflect those values. The Standards for Professional Learning offer the set of behaviors that will be necessary to change the culture.

### **Conclusion**

In this section, I have discussed how a policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Development might be implemented at a district level. I began with an argument against using a lockstep strategic plan, and instead recognized that the

implementation of the standards will require a more adaptive, learning-focused approach. I then described stages of implementation through the lens of an eight-stage process for leading change (Kotter, 2012). Within each stage, I connected with elements of the standards to describe how implementation of the standards will be reflected in the standards themselves, like holding a mirror up to a mirror. In the next section, I will present a Policy Assessment Plan.

## **SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN**

### **Introduction**

In this section, I will describe the collective responsibility of all educators within a school district for implementing the Standards for Professional Learning. I will also address measures educators can use for maintaining accountability, such as reporting procedures. Because implementing the Standards for Professional Learning involves learning *how* to implement them, I will avoid an overly prescriptive assessment plan. It will remain the work of educators in the system to develop an assessment plan as a critical component to implementation. Instead, I will describe a process of continuous improvement (Killion & Crow, 2011) that is integrated with the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle. According to the Deming Institute, the PDSA cycle is “a systematic series of steps for gaining valuable learning and knowledge for the continual improvement of a product or process” (W. Edwards Deming Institute, para 1). By engaging in this cycle, educators can continually monitor the impact of professional learning.

### **Plan**

The first step in the PDSA cycle is planning. This step is characterized by four distinct phases. In the first phase, communities of learners will “gather data to determine student and educator learning needs” (Killion & Crow, p. 24). This data should cross a range of purposes and types, including:

- Student performance data, such as state and local assessments, work samples, and observations.
- Educator performance data, such as formal teacher evaluation measures and informal observations.

- System data, such as culture and climate surveys (e.g., Illinois 5Essentials, Comprehensive School Climate Inventory) or the Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI). The SAI is available through Learning Forward. In districts with 10 schools or less, the cost is \$500 per district with an additional \$35.00 per school.

The second phase of the planning step is to identify shared goals for student and educator learning. Educators should write goals according to the S<sup>2</sup>MART format (O'Neill & Conzemius, 2006). Goals should be *specific* in terms of who the goal impacts, as well as *strategically aligned* to reflect priorities at the team, school, and district level. S<sup>2</sup>MART goals are also *measurable*, *attainable*, *results-oriented* in terms of student outcomes and educator performance, and *timebound*. In order to ensure goal alignment, goals should be set at a strategic level by the school board. It is at the strategic level that the expectations for improving professional learning are set. School and district administrators should set goals at the tactical level by defining common targets that satisfy the strategic purpose, and empower teachers to meet those targets. In order to do so, teachers should establish goals at the operational level (Van Clay, Soldwedel, & Many, 2011) The Innovation Configuration maps published by Learning Forward (Killion, Hord, Roy, Kennedy, & Hirsh, 2012) will be useful in helping stakeholders at all levels define their roles in the goal-setting process.

After goals are established, teachers and administrators will need to engage in professional learning to extend their knowledge or content, pedagogy, or student management. The final phase of the planning step is to select evidence-based strategies to achieve the goals (Killion & Crow, 2011).

## **Do**

The second step in the PDSA cycle involves applying the knowledge gained through professional learning. During this step, educators should have the opportunity to practice and improve the strategies being implemented through ongoing reflection, feedback, and coaching.

## **Study**

The next step in the PDSA cycle is to study evidence used to monitor implementation. According to Anne Conzemius (2012), there are two questions that should be considered when studying data. The first is, “Is the program or process being implemented with fidelity?” (p. 25). For example, if teachers attend professional development training on cooperative learning but are not implementing the principles of cooperative learning with fidelity, evidence of that discrepancy should be revealed during the study step. The second question that Conzemius recommended considering is, “Is [the program or process] having the level of impact that makes it worthy of our investment?” (p. 25). This question calls upon the resource standard, which requires educators to “prioritize human, fiscal, material, technology, and time resources” (Killion & Crow, 2011, p. 32). Answers to both of these questions will impact the following step in the PDSA cycle.

During the studying step, evidence should be prepared for presentation to stakeholder groups. Van Clay et al. (2011) advised educators to “match the right data to the purposes for the right audiences” (p. 18). This involves considering whether the audience is internal to the school system or involves external stakeholder groups. It also involves ensuring that educators feel safe in a data-based culture.

## **Act**

The final step in the PDSA is to act. This step involves evaluating the results in order to decide whether to adopt the strategy, abandon the strategy, or to run the cycle again. Effectiveness of decisions made during this step will be determined by the quality of the S<sup>2</sup>MART goal that was identified in the planning step. Calling to mind that the *r* in S<sup>2</sup>MART refers to results-oriented, it is critical that the results be evaluated in terms of student outcomes and educator performance. For example, a S<sup>2</sup>MART goal stating that 80% of teachers *will be trained* on cooperative learning strategies by the end of the school year says nothing about how many teachers *implemented* what they learned in training, or whether the implementation had an effect on student learning. A more effective goal would involve the amount and impact of the implementation. The evaluation of a strategy's impact should directly relate to educator performance and student learning.

## **Conclusion**

In this section, I have outlined a general format for assessing the impact of adopting the Standards for Professional Learning, which will guide continuous improvement of the district's professional learning. Because learning how to implement the standards is the work of implementing the standards, I have not presented a lockstep assessment plan, but rather a general set of steps that educators can use to engage in continuous improvement. In the next section, I will present a statement of impact that explains why a policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning, if appropriately implemented and assessed, is the most suitable policy.

## SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

In this section, I will provide a summary impact statement that addresses why a district-level policy to implement the Standards for Professional Learning is the appropriate and best policy. The simple answer is this: the Standards for Professional Learning represent a compilation of decades worth of research on what characterizes effective professional learning. Developed by Learning Forward in coordination with 40 professional and educational organizations, the standards summarize the most compelling insights from the field.

Another way to state the potential impact is that the standards present a coherent solution to school improvement. Fullan and Quinn (2016) defined *coherence* as “the shared depth and understanding about the purpose and nature of the work” (p. 1). By working collectively to implement the Standards for Professional Learning, educators will arrive at that shared understanding.

According to Fullan and Quinn, coherence is attained by focusing on the “right drivers” of school improvement. The first right driver is “focusing direction” (p. 46). The Standards for Professional Learning provide a focusing direction by fostering a moral imperative to the work of professional learning. The stem of each standard reminds educators that the goal of professional learning is to increase “educator effectiveness and results for all students” (p.19). This is a lofty aim. However, Fullan and Quinn stated that focusing direction is more than having “uplifting goals” (p. 46). A purpose-driven approach to professional learning also requires knowledge about successful implementation, which is also embedded in the standards.

The second right driver is “creating collaborative cultures” (p. 75). The standards provide insight into the characteristics of collaborative cultures through the learning communities standard. The third right driver is “deepening learning.” According to Fullan and Quinn, “We must shift to a deeper understanding of the process of learning and how we can influence it” (p. 108). Engaging in the work of implementing the Standards for Professional Learning will help educators understand the process of learning more deeply. The learning is the work and the work is learning.

The fourth right driver is “securing accountability.” In particular, “successful systems establish strong degrees of *internal* accountability that serve them well in the external accountability arena” (p. 126, emphasis added). As described in the previous section, using S<sup>2</sup>MART goals in the cycle of continuous improvement will allow educators within a district to develop systems of internal accountability that align with teacher performance and student learning outcomes.

Simply put, a district-level policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning values learning for staff and students. In successful school systems, this value is shared and held sacred by everyone. It is the reason that schools exist. While most people would agree that schools should promote the learning of children, Seymour Sarason (1993) challenged “the assumption that schools exist primarily for the growth and development of children. That assumption is invalid because *teachers cannot create and sustain the conditions for productive development of children if those conditions do not exist for teachers*” (p. xiv, emphasis added). Adopting the Standards for Professional Learning focuses on the learning of adult professionals so that they are equipped to support the learning of children.

The implementation of the policy as described in Section Five is consistent with the vision behind it. Implementing the policy requires *learning how* to implement the policy. As educators work to implement the standards, they are in effect learning how to learn better. Like holding a mirror up to a mirror, the standards become a means to an end, as well as the end itself.

Because the standards apply to educators at all levels within the system, including teachers, coaches, principals, district office personnel, superintendents, board members, and external service providers, the needs of various stakeholders are sufficiently included. Moreover, the stem that begins each standard makes it clear how the standards benefit an even wider group of stakeholders. The stem reads, “Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students...” Increasing educator effectiveness and results for students not only benefits students and their families, it benefits community members and taxpayers and validates the goal of public education.

### **Conclusion**

In this policy advocacy paper, I began by presenting a vision statement that described why a policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning is important. I quoted Joellen Killion (2011), educational researcher and past president of Learning Forward, who said “Professional learning is the only vehicle available to every school to improve teaching and student learning. It is a core practice in all school systems, yet its quality is uneven and its results are inconsistent” (p. 45). Killion’s statement makes clear the importance of focusing on improving conditions for educator learning.

In the next section, I analyzed the need for a district-level policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning from the educational, economic, political, social, and

ethical perspectives. I concluded there is a preponderance of evidence to support the need for adopting a policy.

After presenting the Policy Statement in Section Three, in Section Four I engaged in a pro/con argument for adopting the policy. The pro arguments drew from the analyses of needs. The con argument took the shape of a “pre-mortem,” in which I imagined that the policy had failed and attempted to explain the reasons behind the failure.

In Section Five, I described an implementation plan that was based on Kotter’s (2012) seven-step process of leading change. In this section, I described how a prescriptive approach to implementation would defeat the purpose of the policy. Instead, I suggested the analogy of holding mirror up to a mirror. As the standards reflect what high-quality professional learning looks like, learning how to implement the standards reflects high quality professional learning. In other words, the learning is the work and the work is learning.

In Section Six, I discussed ways of assessing the the policy’s impact. I presented several published tools for assessing impact. I also provided an overview of the cycle of continuous improvement using S<sup>2</sup>MART goals. In this final section, I summarized the impact of adopting a policy to utilize the Standards for Professional Learning. In conclusion, I believe that a policy to adopt the Standards for Professional Learning is necessary and would have a substantial impact on improving educator effectiveness and student learning for all.

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